

EPA-PNL-1315

Palmer Hough/DC/USEPA/US

05/04/2012 08:21 AM

To aicher.rebecca, Barbara Butler, Bill Dunbar, Cara Steiner-Riley, Christopher Hunter, Dave Athons, David Allnutt, Glenn Suter, Hanady Kader, Heather Dean, Heidi Karp, Jason Todd, Jeff Frithsen, Jenny Thomas, Jim Wigington, Joe Ebersole, Judy Smith, Julia McCarthy, Kate Schofield, Marianne Holsman, Mary Thiesing, Michael Szerlog, Palmer Hough, Phil North, Rachel Fertik, Richard Parkin, Sheila Eckman, Tami Fordham, Brendan Gilfillan, Bob Sussman, Nancy Stoner, Denise Keehner, evans.david, Jim Keating

cc

bcc

Subject FYI: Our View: EPA is doing its job - Anchorage Daily News 5-3-12

FYI

Our View: EPA is doing its job

State challenges agency but Bristol Bay work is needed

(05/03/12 21:23:41)

What the Environmental Protection Agency has been doing with its intensive study of the Bristol Bay watershed is exactly what the EPA should be doing.

Since last year, the agency has been trying to determine if a world-class gold and copper mining operation -- the Pebble prospect -- or any large-scale mining operation can coexist with some of the headwaters of the richest salmon fishery on the planet.

The Parnell administration, through Attorney Gen. Michael Geraghty in a March 9 letter, argues that the EPA should stop because it is exceeding its authority and could rob the state of its mineral rights over a vast area. EPA Regional Administrator Dennis McLerran responded that his agency does indeed have authority to do the watershed assessment under the Clean Water Act.

Geraghty contends that McLerran hasn't addressed the state's concerns and said Thursday that McLerran hasn't responded to his most recent letter to that effect.

But the issue of most concern to Alaskans is the very one EPA is trying to answer. Yes, that answer could lead to the end of the Pebble prospect. It's no stretch to conclude that the Parnell administration worries that the EPA will find that such a large-scale mine in such a vital region is too much of an environmental threat -- and a threat that, if realized, could have profound consequences in Western Alaska and beyond.

Although the assessment isn't aimed at Pebble by name, Pebble is the only project of its scale on the table and there's no question that Pebble is the issue. Despite what advocates say about there being no proposal, the operation is already a work in progress with exploratory drilling, other preliminary work and considerable investment well under way.

Native groups and others in the region asked the EPA to kill Pebble off the bat by invoking a section of the Clean Water Act. Instead, the agency decided on a rigorous assessment of

the region to determine whether any large-scale resource development belongs in this watershed. Their study has included hydrology, seismology, topography and meteorology; local knowledge in Dillingham and six villages in the area; on-site inspections and a vetting of proposed mine operations.

McLerran made clear last year that the agency aims to pull together the best available scientific and cultural knowledge before making any regulatory decision.

He and his colleagues said they knew of no other resource situation comparable to Pebble -- nothing on this scale or with stakes so high.

The EPA has been doing essential work -- sooner than later. Despite the scale and the stakes, the Parnell administration certainly hasn't taken the initiative, waiting passively for Pebble proposals and opposing any resistance to the project. Geraghty wrote that the state would pursue all legal means to counter the EPA if the administration felt it was trying to curtail development in Western Alaska. It's likely the Pebble Partnership would do the same.

The EPA has, as McLerran said last year, "a huge decision" to make. But the preliminary watershed assessment due out next week is just the first step. The agency should take it without fear or favor and let the chips fall. Now is not the time to stop.
<http://www.adn.com/2012/05/03/2451323/our-view-epa-is-doing-its-job.html>